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ABSTRACT

This study addresses attrition in the teaching profession, a major problem in Florida's schools. The study's target population was a random sample of 10% of the teachers from a Florida metropolitan school district employing 5,500 teachers. Data were gathered through a mailed questionnaire--the Survey of Teacher Characteristics and Activities. The survey assessed their long-range teaching plans, demographic characteristics, current work conditions, professional activities, and educational views. The return rate was 53%; of the 310 respondents, 127 were elementary school teachers, 70 were middle school teachers, 86 were high school teachers, and 27 were adult vocational-technical/other school teachers. The responses of teachers who planned to quit teaching (31%) were compared with those of teachers who planned to continue teaching. Fifty-eight respondents, who were over 50 years old, were excluded from the study based on the assumption that their responses were largely related to plans to retire. Results from the 242 teachers under the age of 50 years, who responded to a question concerning their long-range teaching plans, indicate that, as compared to teachers who were planning to remain in teaching, teachers who were contemplating changing careers were less comfortable with their working condition, more negative about teaching and education, and more involved in professional associations. Interest in administrative/supervisory positions and years of teaching experience did not appear to significantly influence decisions regarding continuation of a teaching career. Fourteen data tables are included. (TJH)

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TEACHERS AT RISK: A PROFILE OF THE TEACHER PREDISPOSED TO QUIT

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Teachers at Risk: A Profile of the Teacher Predisposed to Quit

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ABSTRACT. Attrition in the teaching profession continues to be a major problem in Florida's schools. A random sample of 310 teachers from a metropolitan school district in Florida anonymously responded to questions about their long range teaching plans, demographic characteristics, current work conditions, professional activities, and educational views. The responses of teachers who plan to quit teaching (31%) were compared with those who plan to remain teachers. Results show that those who contemplate quitting differ in several important ways from those who plan to continue.

At a time of state-wide population growth and expanding school enrollments, Florida can ill afford to lose teachers. Yet, attrition in the teaching profession has continued to be a major problem facing large and small school districts throughout the state. Evidence exists that teachers' uncertainty about their chosen profession registers almost immediately after they enter teaching. For example, in studies of first year teachers in central Florida, Villeme & Hall (1983-84) found that over 25 percent of new teachers express the intention to quit teaching or admit they are considering quitting.

Teacher turnover should be a source of great concern to administrators and educational policy makers, as well as teacher preparation institutions,

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because as Kremer and Hoffman (1981) note, the considerable resources, manpower, and planning invested in teacher preservice and in-service training are ultimately wasted on job leavers. They add that "teachers who are merely *thinking* about leaving the field are no less of a concern than those who actually carry out their intention, because the presence of disgruntled elements in a school system may well infect others and start a chain reaction" (p. 1). The effects may range from a loss of teacher motivation to a decline in pupil achievement.

The purpose of this study was to compare teachers who are contemplating quitting the teaching profession with teachers whose long range plans are to continue in teaching. The teachers were compared using the following classes of attributes: (1) demographic characteristics, (2) current work conditions, (3) professional activities, (4) future plans, and (5) educational views and attitudes. The intent was to generate a profile of teachers within a large urban school district in Florida who may be at risk of leaving the teaching profession.

Method

Subjects

The target population for the study consisted of all school-based public school teachers (approximately 5500) in a large metropolitan district in central Florida. The population was stratified by school and a 10% proportional random sample was drawn from each school.

Procedures

The data for the study were gathered through a mailed questionnaire entitled Survey of Teacher Characteristics and Activities (STCA). All teacher responses were anonymous. The STCA contained items concerning the respondent's demographic characteristics, current work conditions and

perceptions, professional activities, future plans, educational views, and attitudes towards teaching and students.

The rate of return was 53 percent (N = 310). A check of the response sheets produced no notable deviation of the respondents from the target population in terms of the proportion of teachers at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Of the 310 respondents, 127 (41%) were elementary teachers, 70 (22%) were middle school teachers, and 86 (28%) were high school teachers. Twenty-seven (9%) held adult vocational/technical or other types of teaching positions.

The comparison groups were established on the basis of the teachers' response to a question concerning long range teaching plans. Of the 300 teachers answering the question, 58 were over age 50. These 58 were excluded from the study on the assumption that their responses, or at least a high percentage of them, were predicated on plans to retire; indeed, a number of those above age 50 volunteered information about their imminent retirement. Of the remaining 242 teachers, 166 (69%) indicated, in response to the question, that they intended to continue in teaching, and 76 (31%) indicated either that they were planning to quit or that they were presently undecided about whether to stay or quit. These two groups of respondents served as the comparison groups in the study.

Findings

Demographic and Educational Attributes

The STCA contained questions about the respondents' sex, total years teaching experience, marital status (married, single, divorced), highest academic degree (bachelors or lower, masters or higher), and source of bachelor's degree (Florida institution, out-of-state institution).

Based on chi square analyses, no relationships were found between the respondents' long range teaching plans and the variables of sex, marital status, level of formal education, or source of bachelors degree. Also, based on ANOVA, no relationship was found between teaching plans and total years teaching experience. These results suggest that teachers who are considering leaving the teaching profession are indistinguishable from the other teachers insofar as the above demographic and educational characteristics are concerned.

Current Work Conditions

To determine the teachers' current work conditions and perceptions, the STCA contained questions covering teaching level (elementary, middle, high), recent changes in teaching responsibilities, satisfaction with current employment, adequacy of student discipline at their school, and whether they perceived teaching to be getting easier or harder as the years go by. The teachers also completed a six-item Teaching Autonomy Scale (TAS) adopted from the School Environmental Complexity Scale of Fleming (1982). The TAS was designed to determine the degree of autonomy perceived by teachers in their work situation.

Based on chi square analyses, the two groups of teachers differed in their response to most of the above questions. For example, teaching level was related to long range plans, such that high school teachers were more likely to say that they are considering quitting than were elementary or middle school teachers (See Table 1). Also, those teachers who reported a major change in their teaching responsibilities within the last two years showed a greater tendency to contemplate quitting than those whose teaching responsibilities had not changed (See Table 2). Those changes most typically involved changes in subjects taught or changes in the type or age of students taught. Job satisfaction was an especially strong indicator of future plans; those who expressed some degree of dissatisfaction with their

Table 1 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Level of Teaching

Teaching Plans	Teaching Level*						Total
	Elementary		Middle		High		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	82	(52)	36	(23)	39	(25)	157
Contemplate Quitting	25	(35)	16	(23)	30	(42)	71
Total	107		52		69		228

*Chi square for teaching plans by teaching level, 7.92; df = 2; p = .019

Table 2 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Major Changes in Teaching Responsibilities Within the Last Two Years

Teaching Plans	Major Changes in Teaching Responsibilities*				Total
	Yes		No		
	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	36	(22)	127	(78)	163
Contemplate Quitting	26	(35)	49	(65)	75
Total	62		176		238

*Chi square for teaching plans by major change in teaching responsibilities, 4.22; df = 1; p = .040

Table 3 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Satisfaction With Current Employment

Teaching Plans	Satisfaction with Current Employment* Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Dissatisfied		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	83	(50)	64	(39)	19	(11)	166
Contemplate Quitting	7	(9)	38	(51)	30	(40)	75
Total	90		102		49		241

*Chi square for teaching plans by satisfaction with current employment, 45.38; df = 2; p = .001

Table 4 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Discipline At Your School

Teaching Plans	Discipline at Your School* Too Lax		About Right		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	57	(35)	107	(65)	164
Contemplate Quitting	38	(52)	35	(48)	73
Total	95		142		237

*Chi square for teaching plans by discipline at your school, 6.29; df = 1; p = .012

current employment were more prone to say that they are contemplating quitting than those who expressed satisfaction with current employment (See Table 3). In addition, those teachers who perceived discipline at their school to be too lax and those that perceived that teaching is getting harder as the years go by were more likely to contemplate quitting than teachers with different perceptions on these points (See Tables 4 & 5).

However, based on ANOVA, the two groups of teachers did not differ in their perceptions on the TAS, denoting the degree of autonomy they exercise in their work situation; (i.e., they responded similarly to such questions as the extent to which they use their own discretion in the way they do their job and the extent to which standards for their classrooms are set by themselves).

A multiple regression analysis was performed on long range teaching plans using the following work condition variables as predictors: teaching level, change in teaching responsibilities, satisfaction with current employment, adequacy of student discipline, and the perceptions of teaching as getting easier or harder. The results, summarized in Table 6, show a multiple R of .445 and an R^2 of .198.

Overall, the teacher's responses to questions about their work conditions suggest that factors related to the work environment may be significant indicators of job persistence in the population of teachers studied.

Professional Activities

Questions on professional activities on the STCA covered such concerns as frequency of reading professional journals, membership in the local bargaining unit, and membership in professional education associations at the national, state, and local levels. Through chi square analyses, the data show that the two groups of teachers did not differ in

Table 5 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Whether Teaching is Getting Easier or Harder As the Years Go By

Teaching Plans	As Years Go By, Is Teaching Getting* Easier? N	%	No Change N	%	Harder? N	%	Total
Plan to Continue	73	(45)	40	(24)	51	(31)	164
Contemplate Quitting	23	(30)	12	(16)	41	(54)	76
Total	96		52		92		240

*Chi square for teaching plans by difficulty of teaching as years go by, 11.48; df = 2; p = .003

Table 6 Multiple Regression of Work Condition Variables on Long Range Teaching Plans (N = 217)

Variable	Coefficient	t	p(2 TAIL)
Constant	.834	3.83	.000
Respon	-.110	-1.71	.089
Easier	.124	.71	.476
Discip	.034	.52	.604
Satis	.237	5.51	.000
Teachlev	.067	1.99	.048

Mult. R = .445 Mult. R^2 = .198 Adjusted R^2 = .179

Analysis of Variance

Source	df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	p
Regression	5	1.820	10.425	.001
Residual	211	.175		

regard to membership in the local bargaining unit or in regard to membership in national and state level professional associations. However, differences were apparent between the two groups in regard to membership in local professional associations and in regard to reading professional journals (See Tables 7/8). Those teachers who say they are contemplating quitting registered a higher proportion of membership in local professional associations and reported a greater tendency to read the professional journals pertinent to their teaching field than those who plan to continue in teaching. From these results, it would appear that those teachers who are thinking about leaving may be more professionally active in certain ways than those who plan to stay.

A multiple regression analysis was performed on long range teaching plans using frequency of reading of professional journals and membership in local professional associations as predictor variables. The results, summarized in Table 9, show only modest predictive power for the two variables as a set.

Future Plans

In regard to future plans, teachers were asked if they have an interest in moving into an administrative or supervisory position in the near future and if they had begun work on a more advanced degree or made plans in that regard. Based on chi square analyses, neither group showed a disproportionate tendency toward either of these activities. To further examine long range teaching plans in relation to advanced degree work, the 143 respondents holding a bachelor degree or less were isolated and a chi square calculated between their teaching plans and advance degree plans. Again, no relationship was found. These results suggest that the teachers who are predisposed to quit are not being lured away from teaching by either the desire for administrative responsibilities or the desire for more formal education.

Table 7 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Membership in Professional Educational Associations at the Local Level

Teaching Plans	Membership in Local Association* Yes		No		Total
	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	71	(44)	91	(56)	162
Contemplate Quitting	45	(63)	27	(37)	72
Total	116		118		234

*Chi square for teaching plans by membership in local professional associations, 6.95; df = 1; p = .008

Table 8 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Frequency of Reading of Professional Journals Pertinent to Your Teaching Field

Teaching Plans	Reading of Professional Journals* Regularly (Monthly)		Periodically (Several Times a Year)		Hardly Ever (No More Than Three Times a Year)		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	41	(25)	77	(46)	48	(29)	166
Contemplate Quitting	32	(42)	22	(29)	22	(29)	76
Total	73		99		70		242

*Chi square for teaching plans by frequency of professional reading, 9.11; df = 2; p = .011

Table 9 Multiple Regression of Professional Activity Variables on Long Range Teaching Plans (N = 234)

Variable	Coefficient	t	p(2 TAIL)
Constant	1.605	14.34	.000
Journals	-.039	-.97	.331
Local	-.147	-2.41	.017

Mult. R = .184 Mult. R^2 = .034 Adjusted R^2 = .025

Analysis of Variance

Source	df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	p
Regression	2	.839	4.026	.019
Residual	231	.209		

Table 10 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Public Support for Education in the District

Teaching Plans	Public Support for Education* Very Strong		Moderately Strong		Not Very Strong		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	28	(18)	100	(62)	32	(20)	160
Contemplate Quitting	5	(7)	42	(57)	27	(36)	74
Total	33		142		59		234

*Chi square for teaching plans by public support for education, 9.87; df = 2; p = .007

Educational Views and Attitudes

To allow the teachers to indicate their educational views, the STCA contained questions concerning the degree of public support for education in their district and the outlook for public education in the state over the next five years. Attitudes were assessed with a five-item Attitude Toward Teaching (ATT) scale, and a seven-item Attitude Toward Students (ATS) scale. The ATT and ATS scales were adaptations of attitude scales developed by Hall, Smitley, & Villeme (1980) and produced alpha reliabilities of .89 and .92, respectively. In addition, two questions inquired about the teachers' perceptions of parents, specifically, whether parents are fair and supportive.

The two groups of teachers differed in their responses to the questions about their educational views. Chi square analyses show that those teachers who contemplate quitting, as compared to the other teachers, were more negative about public support for education in their district and more likely to view the outlook for public education over the next five years as "not promising" (See Tables 10 & 11).

Analyses based on ANOVA show that the two teacher groups also responded differently to the ATT & ATS scales. The teachers predisposed to quit reported more negative attitudes toward teaching, as compared to the teachers who plan to continue (See Table 12). Specifically, they were more likely to see teaching as "static," "dull," "unmotivating," "unrewarding," and "unpleasant." These same teachers were also more negative in their attitude about students (See Table 13). They tended to view students more in terms of such adjectives as "dull," "unmotivated," "unprepared," "unsatisfying," "unrewarding," "unsupportive," and "unsuccessful," as compared to those teachers who plan to stay in teaching.

A multiple regression analysis was performed on long range teaching plans using four predictor variables: ATT score, ATS score, degree of public

support for education, and outlook for public education. The results, summarized in Table 14, show a multiple R of .408 and an R^2 of .167.

Results of ANOVA's on the teachers' perceptions about parents show no difference between the two teacher groups. Those teachers predisposed to quit were no less likely to see parents as fair and supportive than were those intending to stay in teaching.

Overall, these results suggest that, in the population of teachers surveyed, the attitudes and views teachers form about their profession can be important indicators of their long range teaching plans and, therefore of their predisposition to persist in teaching.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that a substantial portion (31%) of the teachers surveyed are contemplating quitting the teaching profession. The findings further show that those teachers who contemplate quitting differ in several important ways from those who intend to continue in teaching.

First, compared to their peers, teachers predisposed to quit indicate a greater discomfort with their work condition. They express a greater degree of dissatisfaction with their current job situation, are more likely to see teaching as getting harder, not easier, as the years go by, and tend to perceive discipline at their school as too lax. Recent changes in teaching responsibilities are also characteristic of those predisposed to quit, suggesting a certain degree of work-related stress connected with such changes. Finally, teaching level is implicated, such that a greater proportion of high school teachers shows a predisposition to quit than elementary teachers. The fact that teacher sex is unrelated to predisposition to quit suggests that this tendency in high school teachers may be job-related.

Table 11 Long Range Teaching Plans in Relation to Outlook for Public Education in Florida Over the Next Five Years

Teaching Plans	Outlook for Public Education*						
	Promising		Uncertain		Not Promising		Total
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Plan to Continue	58	(36)	69	(43)	34	(21)	161
Contem-plate Quitting	11	(15)	39	(53)	23	(32)	73
Total	69		108		57		234

*Chi square for teaching plans by outlook for public education, 10.92; df = 2; p = .004

Table 12 ANOVA on Attitude Toward Teaching by Long Range Teaching Plans

Source	df	MS	F	p	R^2
Plans	1	810.91	31.37	.001	.122
Error	226	25.85			

Plans	N	M	SD
Plan to Continue	158	24.09	4.75
Contemplate Quitting	70	20.00	5.77

Table 13 ANOVA on Attitude Toward Students by Long Range Teaching Plans

Source	df	MS	F	p	R^2
Plans	1	205.82	4.11	.044	.018
Error	227	50.06			

Plans	N	M	SD
Plan to Continue	157	30.46	6.76
Contemplate Quitting	72	28.42	7.73

Table 14 Multiple Regression of Educational Outlook and Attitude Variables on Long Range Teaching Plans (N = 214)

Variable	Coefficient	t	p(2 TAIL)
Constant	1.513	6.92	.000
Public	.099	2.04	.043
Outlook	.056	1.60	.112
Teachtot	-.031	-4.96	.000
Studtot	.006	1.21	.229

Mult. R = .408 Mult. R^2 = .167 Adjusted R^2 = .151

Analysis of Variance

Source	df	Mean Square	F-Ratio	p
Regression	4	1.901	10.444	.001
Residual	209	.182		

Second, compared to their peers, teachers who contemplate quitting hold more negative attitudes and views about teaching and about education in general. For one thing, they are more disparaging of both students and teaching, characterizing each in terms of such adjectives as "dull," and "unrewarding." For another, they are more prone to view education as lacking in public support and more apt to describe the outlook for public education as "not promising." Certainly, people who tend to view both their work and their clients in a negative light and who see a lack of support for their profession are going to be susceptible to thoughts of quitting. Teachers, clearly, are no exception.

Third, teachers who contemplate quitting appear to be more professionally involved than teachers who plan to continue in teaching. No differences were discernible between the two groups of teachers in terms of membership in the local bargaining unit or membership in state or national professional associations. These results suggest that teachers at risk of quitting are no less active in professional matters than those who plan to stay. More interesting, differences actually favoring those at risk were discernible in regard to membership in local professional associations and in regard to the reading of pertinent professional journals. Why those teachers predisposed to quit are more active professionally at the local level and more apt to read the literature of their field can only be pondered at this point. But the results do suggest that, far from being *marginal* professionals, these teachers are concerned with the practice of their profession and are interested in keeping abreast of research to make it better.

The data indicate that teachers who contemplate quitting show no more interest in an administrative or supervisory position or in advanced degree work than teachers who plan to continue. Therefore, it would appear that teachers predisposed to quit are not being distracted from teaching by either the desire for administrative responsibilities or the desire for more

formal education. The data also fail to show either marital status or years of teaching experience as an indicator of plans to continue or discontinue teaching.

Murphy (1982) identified three types of teacher dropouts: the "honest departers," the "overworked," and the "confused and unhappy." He found that the "honest departers" - those who are primarily economically motivated or who openly admitted a disinterest in teaching - were remarkably free of guilt feeling in connection with their decision to quit teaching. But the other types of teacher dropouts, the "overworked" and the "confused and unhappy," were noted for their burnout symptoms and were characterized by an acceptance and internalization of failure. The pattern of responses of the teachers in this study who are contemplating quitting suggests that these teachers are not, for the most part, "honest departers." Dissatisfied with their current employment, experiencing major changes in their teaching responsibilities, holding negative attitudes toward teaching and toward students, and pessimistic in their outlooks for public education, a large number of these teachers would seem to be expressing both unhappiness and frustration with their chosen profession. These are teachers at risk of being lost to teaching.

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